

Upadesa Saram (The Essence of Instruction)

There is a legend that a group of rishis once lived in the Daruka forest together, practising rites by which they acquired supernatural powers. By the same means they hoped to attain final liberation. In this, however, they were mistaken, for action can only result in action, not in the cessation of action; rites can produce powers but not the peace of liberation which is beyond rites and powers and all forms of action. Siva determined to convince them of their error and therefore appeared before them as a wandering sadhu. Together with him came Vishnu in the form of a beautiful lady. All the rishis were smitten with love for this lady and thereby their equilibrium was disturbed and their rites and powers were adversely affected. Moreover their wives, who were also living with them in the forest, all fell in love with the strange sadhu. Incensed at this, they conjured up an elephant and a tiger by magic rites and sent them against him. Siva, however, slew them easily and took the elephant's skin for a robe and the tiger's for a wrap. The rishis then realized that they were up against one more powerful than themselves and they bowed down to him and asked him for instruction. He then explained to them that it is not by action but by renunciation of action that one attains liberation.

The poet Muruganar wanted to write a hundred verses on this theme but he could not readily proceed beyond seventy verses. It then occurred to him that Bhagavan was the proper person to write the verses relating to Siva's instructions. He therefore begged Bhagavan to compose them and Bhagavan accordingly composed thirty Tamil verses. He himself later rendered them into Sanskrit. These thirty verses were subsequently translated by Bhagavan into Telugu under the name of Anubhuti Saram first, and Upadesa Saram afterwards. Bhagavan likewise rendered them into Malayalam. The Sanskrit version, Upadesa Saram, was chanted before him daily together with the Vedas and continues to be chanted before his shrine; that is to say, it is treated as a scripture. He refers to the various paths to liberation, grading them in order of efficiency and excellence, and showing that the best is Self-enquiry.

1. Action yields fruit,

For so the Lord ordains it.
How can action be the Lord?
It is insentient.

2. The fruit of action passes.
But action leaves behind
Seed of further action
Leading to an endless ocean of action;
Not at all to moksha.

3. Disinterested action
Surrendered to the Lord
Purifies the mind and points
The way to moksha.

4. This is certain:
Worship, praise and meditation,
Being work of body, speech and mind,
Are steps for orderly ascent.

5. Ether, fire, air, water, earth,
Sun, moon, and living beings --
Worship of these,
Regarded all as forms of His,
Is perfect worship of the Lord.

6. Better than hymns of praise
Is repetition of the Name;
Better low-voiced than loud,
But best of all
Is meditation in the mind.

7. Better than spells of meditation
Is one continuous current,
Steady as a stream,
Or downward flow of oil.

8. Better than viewing Him as Other,
Indeed the noblest attitude of all,
Is to hold Him as the `I' within,
The very `I'.

9. Abidance in pure being
Transcending thought through love intense
Is the very essence
Of supreme devotion.

10. Absorption in the Heart of being,
Whence we sprang,
Is the path of action, of devotion,
Of union and of knowledge.

11. Holding the breath controls the mind,
Like a bird caught in a net.
Breath-regulation helps
Absorption in the Heart.

12. Mind and breath (as thought and action)
Fork out like two branches.
But both spring
From a single root.

13. Absorption is of two sorts:
Submergence and destruction.
Mind submerged rises again;
Dead, it revives no more.

14. Breath controlled and thought restrained,
The mind turned one-way inward
Fades and dies.

15. Mind extinct, the mighty seer
Returns to his own natural being
And has no action to perform.

16. It is true wisdom
For the mind to turn away
From outer objects and behold
Its own effulgent form.

17. When unceasingly the mind
Scans its own form,
There is nothing of the kind.
For everyone

This path direct is open.

18. Thoughts alone make up the mind;
And of all thoughts the `I' thought is the root.
What is called mind is but the notion `I'.

19. When one turns within and searches
Whence this `I' thought arises,
The shamed `I' vanishes
And wisdom's quest begins.

20. Where this `I' notion fades,
Now there as I, as I, arises
The One, the very Self, The Infinite.

21. Of the term, `I' the permanent import
Is `That'. For even in deep sleep
Where we have no sense of `I'
We do not cease to be.

22. Body, senses, mind, breath, sleep --
All insentient and unreal --
Cannot be `I',
`I' who am the Real.

23. For knowing That which Is
There is no other knower.
Hence Being is Awareness
And we are all Awareness.

24. In the nature of their being, creature and creator
Are in substance one.
They differ only
In adjuncts and awareness.

25. Seeing oneself free of all attributes
Is to see the Lord,
For He shines ever as the pure Self.

26. To know the Self is but to be the Self,
For It is non-dual.
In such knowledge

One abides as That.

27. That is true knowledge which transcends
Both knowledge and ignorance,
For in pure knowledge
There is no object to be known.

28. Having known one's nature one abides
As being with no beginning and no end
In unbroken consciousness and bliss.

29. Abiding in this state of bliss
Beyond bondage and release,
Is steadfastness
In service of the Lord.

30. All ego gone,
Living as That alone
Is penance good for growth,
Sings Ramana, the Self.

(Translated by Prof. K. Swaminathan)